

Engaging Young People in Statewide Efforts to Address DMC and Improve Juvenile Justice Systems



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Workshop Objectives

- Participants will become familiar with a process to develop a statewide juvenile justice youth advisory council;
- learn about the community focus group project facilitated by young people across the state; and
- develop an increased understanding of youth development principles and the active role that youth can play in addressing DMC and state-wide juvenile justice efforts, in general.



Juvenile Delinquency & Prevention Act of 2002

42 U.S.C. 5633 [Sec.223]

“In order to receive formula grants under this part, a State shall submit a plan for carrying out its purposes applicable to a 3-year period...such plan shall...provide for an advisory group...

at least one-fifth of which members shall be under the age of 24 at the time of appointment; and at least 3 members who have been or are currently under the jurisdiction of the juvenile justice system...”

The advisory group shall “...contact and seek regular input from juveniles currently under the jurisdiction of the juvenile justice system.”

Challenges to Meeting the Federal Requirements

- Systemic Barriers
- Organizational Barriers



Systemic Barriers



- **NY's age of criminal responsibility**
- **High recidivism rates**
- **Confidentiality Issues**

Organizational Barriers

- **Appointment Process**
- **Government/Civil Service Staffing Structure**
- **Nature of SAG Business**
- **Meeting Times/Locations**

Discussion

re: Challenges to Youth Participation

How many of the SAGs represented have had trouble with youth involvement?

What are some of the challenges you have faced?

Lots of us have TROUBLES when we try to involve young people in our work...the key is what we do with 'em.

T RANSPORTATION

Bringing folks together from across the state is a challenge. Need to arrange for bus, train, taxi, maybe even airplane.

R ELATIONSHIPS

Need to figure out roles and responsibilities of staff and young people.

O UTREACH

Staying connected with young people can seem almost impossible. Utilize mail, e-mail, phone, alternate contacts , even Facebook.

U NDERSTANDING

Recognize the work is not always the #1 priority for all youth members.

B ELIEFS

Value young people's input and contributions as more than tokens.

L IASONS

Need local mentors to connect with youth locally between projects.

E NERGY

Requires a "spirit" of passion and commitment from staff; sometimes need to go the "extra mile" to keep young people involved.

S TIPENDS

Provide young people with incentives to participate.

NYS Juvenile Justice Youth Advisory Council BASICS

- 20+ members between the ages of 16 and 24 who have a personal interest in and/or experience with the juvenile/criminal justice systems.
- An advisory committee to the JJAG
- Allows for regular input and feedback from young people regarding juvenile justice policies and practices.

Steps in building an effective youth advisory council:

- **Identify necessary resources**
Staff, funding, time, supplies...
- **Develop positive working relationships with key juvenile justice service providers**
Administrators and front line workers; state and local
- **Identify community mentors and leadership**
Local supporters and “champions for the cause”
- **Establish regional work groups**
Give opportunities for youth to be “hometown heroes”
- **Maintain a commitment to youth development principles and concepts**

Youth Advisory Council Basics

- Leadership/Structure
- Membership
- Activities: quarterly meetings; training; program monitoring

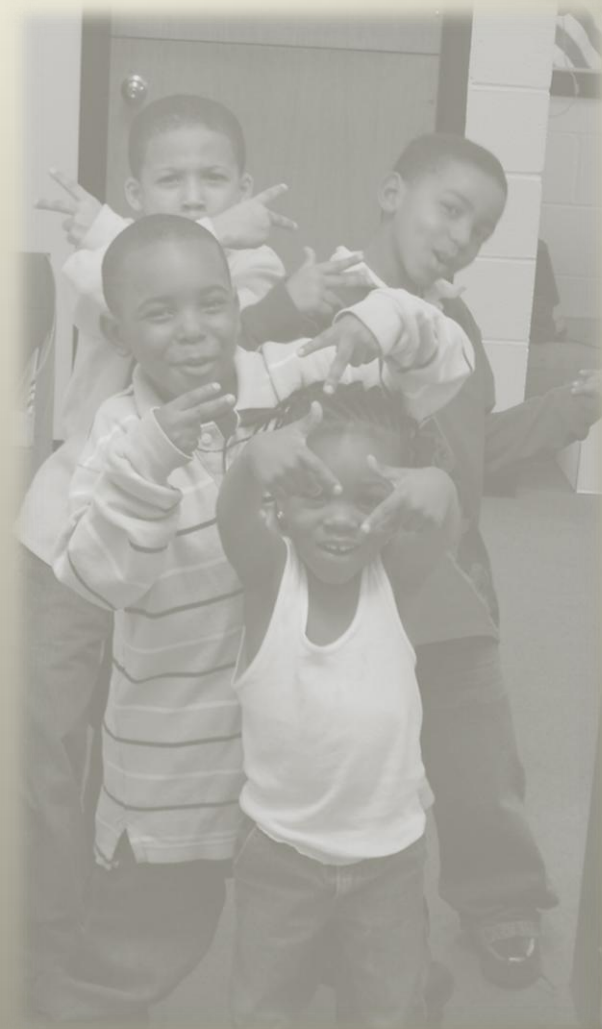
Driving Principles of Youth Development

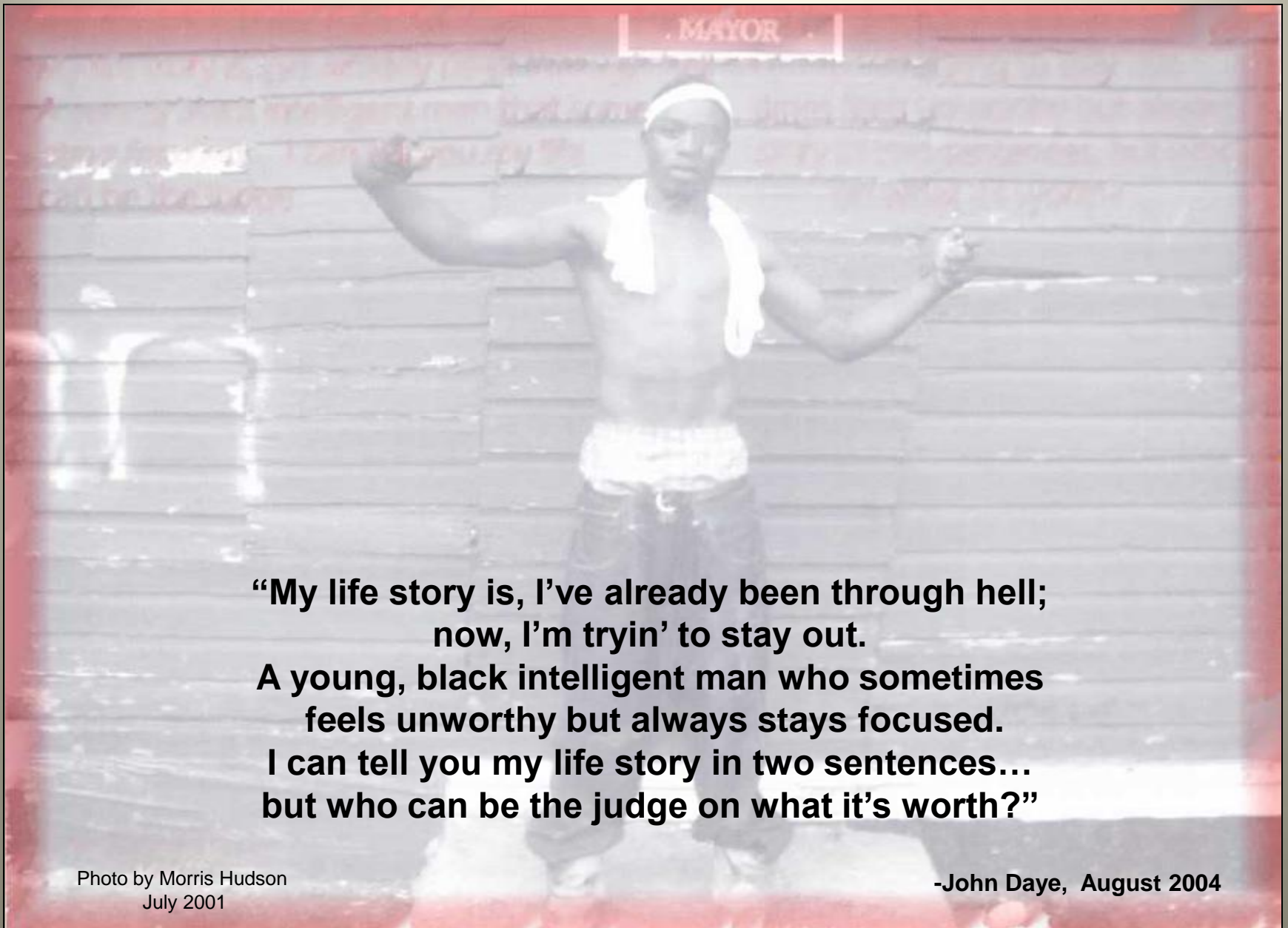
- **External Assets**

- Support
- Empowerment
- Boundaries and Expectations
- Constructive Use of Time

- **Internal Assets**

- Commitment to Learning
- Positive Values
- Social Competencies
- Positive Identity





**“My life story is, I’ve already been through hell;
now, I’m tryin’ to stay out.**

**A young, black intelligent man who sometimes
feels unworthy but always stays focused.**

**I can tell you my life story in two sentences...
but who can be the judge on what it’s worth?”**

Photo by Morris Hudson
July 2001

-John Daye, August 2004

Linking to the SAG Through Specific Projects



- **Focus groups**
- **Development of materials**
- **Juvenile justice program monitoring**



What Do YOUth Think?

(about the juvenile and criminal justice systems)

A Youth Focus Group Project

Purpose of Focus Group Project

The purpose of this project was simply to receive input from young people from across the state that may have been involved in or impacted by the juvenile and/or criminal justice systems regarding their thoughts, concerns, and experiences with those systems.

Information from the focus groups can help guide juvenile justice policy, programming and services in New York State.

We asked youth 3 main questions: (and a lot of follow-up questions)

The Juvenile Justice System: What's it all about?

Who does it involve? Who does it impact? What is a "juvenile"?

**What's the difference between the juvenile justice system
and the adult criminal justice system?**

•What kinds of crimes are young people arrested for?

Why do young people commit crimes? Why arrest young people?

Who gets arrested? Where do young people get arrested?

Are there things that young people shouldn't be arrested for?

Why do so many young people get re-arrested?

•Does "the system" work?

What are your experiences with the system?

What is the purpose of incarceration?

Are there things that should be changed?

If you were...(in charge) what would you do differently?


And in their answers they asked:

•Why don't people try to understand why we do the things we do?"

•“If people really wanted to impact juvenile crime why don't they do it like this?"



Why We Do What We Do: Personal Pain



Many young people have suffered a lot of trauma and have issues that haven't been addressed – angry at the world and feel all alone.

- Neglect/child abuse
- Grief and loss issues
- Drug Abuse
- Incarcerated family members

“I think that deep down inside they think that we aren't gonna make it.”

Development of Materials

- Video of conversations with youth in placement
- “Through Our Eyes” staff training tool



You work with young people everyday.

Some of us have made some pretty bad choices...

Have you ever stopped and wondered why?



**For a few minutes...
try to see things**

Through Our Eyes





**We're not making excuses for
our behaviors and actions...**

**we just think it's important that you
understand more about us.**

Who we are...where we come from...

Allow us to introduce ourselves:





I'm Erica...

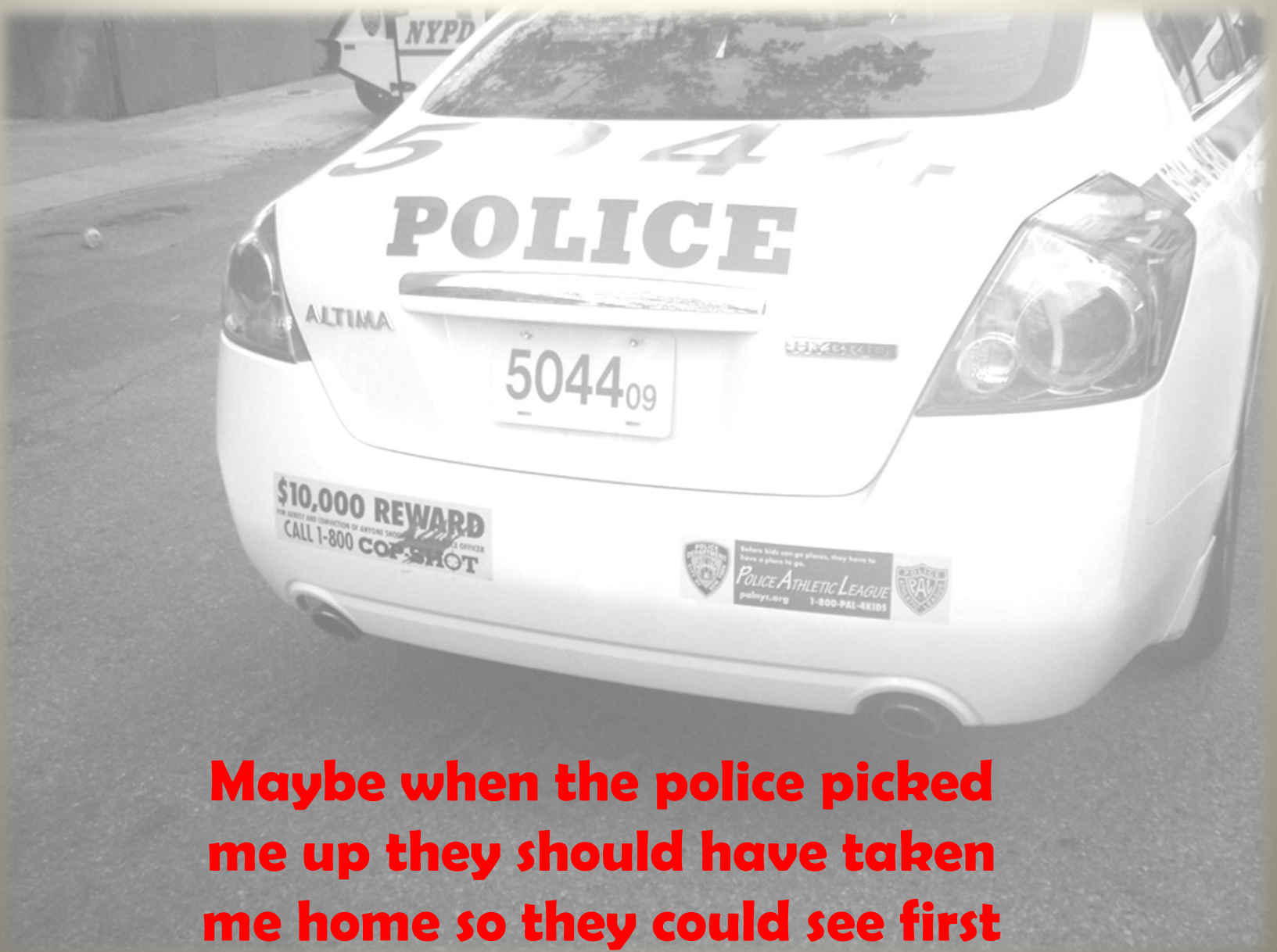
I'm 15.





So I'm sitting here because my mom didn't show up for my court date...





Maybe when the police picked me up they should have taken me home so they could see first hand how we live.





...maybe then they'd understand why

I stole from the corner store.



I'm sittin' here like an animal in a cage...



...at least I'm not hungry anymore, right?



Program Monitoring

- Training on DCJS-funded program purpose areas
- Development of Site Monitoring Schedule
- Providing feedback to the staff and JJAG:
 - Progress in achieving goals
 - Youth attendance and participation
 - Conditions of facilities and meeting spaces
 - Staffing
 - Issues of concern
 - Highlights of effective components

Next Steps

•Family Court Project

Phase 1: Young people participate in training activities in an effort to gain a basic understanding of the workings of the local family court systems in processing juvenile delinquency cases. These training activities shall include: Family Court/JD Processing “101” workshops; observations of local family court sessions; and interviews with family court judges.

Phase 2: Youth Advisory Council will facilitate focus groups and/or interviews with parents/caregivers of young people who have had juvenile justice system involvement to gather information about their thoughts, ideas, experiences in dealing with delinquency cases in the family court system.

Phase 3: Young people and staff will review all of the information gathered from focus groups; develop draft materials designed to better prepare families to navigate the family court process; and organize a distribution plan to provide materials to those community members.

•Planning & Visioning/Developing Goals & Priorities

•Developing Recommendations to the JJAG

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